

## Headteachers Conflict Management Styles and Teachers Job Satisfaction in Malaysian Primary Schools

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the conflict management styles among head teachers and the relationships between the styles and teachers job satisfaction. The study also examined the head teachers conflict management styles and teachers job satisfaction based on the demographic characteristics. A questionnaire was administered to 120 respondents in 5 primary schools in the district of Tampin, Malaysia. Descriptive and Manova statistics were used to examine the levels and differences of conflict management styles used among head teachers and teachers job satisfaction in terms of their demographic characteristics. The findings showed that the head teachers used all the five conflict management styles: cooperating style, adapting style, compromising style, bargaining style, and problem-solving style. Most head teachers preferred cooperating style as compared to bargaining style. Further, the findings showed that there was no difference for all the five conflict management styles in relation to the head teacher demographic characteristics. However, the findings showed that there was a significant difference for teachers job satisfaction in terms of years of service and no difference for teachers job satisfaction in terms of other demographic characteristics. Implications for all policymakers to improve future policy related to leadership training for all head teachers in schools were discussed.

**Keywords:** *conflict management styles, teachers job satisfaction, head teachers, teachers*

## INTRODUCTION

School is a unique organization with many members and different goals as compared to other organizations. This requires effective leadership styles among head teachers. Headteachers face various kinds of conflict from parents, communities, teachers, and students. This suggests that it is very crucial for head teachers to have the knowledge and skills to manage these conflicts. According to Darwyan (2010), conflicts affect teachers job performance. Conflict is inevitable in every organization and head teachers

should use suitable styles to suit the conflict context. Mohd Foad (2005) affirms that different management styles are needed to suit the behavior of an individual.

Conflict grows in dynamics. It occurs in individual, group, organization and society. According to Rahim (1992, 2001), conflict is defined as incompatibility, disagreement or differences in any or within social entities. Malike (2008) further affirms that conflict is a phenomenon with a subjective attribute. It could not be traced at early stage until it is obvious when the parties involved reacted to the conflict. Muhammad Asyraf et al. (2014) postulate that the diversity of workers in terms of age, gender and job positions may spark conflicts. Thus, conflict is seen as a threatening situation that happens in any individual, group or organization influenced by surroundings.

Conflict management is an action or intervention used by the head teacher in coordinating, giving instructions and controlling the issues or problems arise between and within individuals, groups or organizations. Conflict management is important in managing a school effectively (Darwyan 2010). Conflict management style is divided into two approaches (Rahim 2001). The first approach deals with the amount and causes of conflict. The second approach deals with the styles of handling the conflict such as cooperation style, competing for style, accommodating style, avoiding style and compromising style.

In addition, job satisfaction happens when perceptions about the needs of particular tasks are fulfilled. Job satisfaction is an important element in any organization because it increases the workers' commitment towards their organization. In contrary, workers who are not satisfied with their work environment have low commitment and considered as a loss to the organization. In many occasions, leaders are perceived as important figures to manage the workers. This also involves the school organization in which it could affect the effectiveness, the relationship between teachers, teacher deployment, and teacher absenteeism. Thus, an effective school has a head teacher who manages conflict well. He or she is very influential in school operations. The conflict that happens in or out of school challenges the head teacher abilities to resolve the conflict. The conflict management styles of a head teacher have an impact on teachers job satisfaction and workers in school.

There is no definite strategy for effective conflict management. According to Rahim (2002), effective conflict management reduces the negative conflict and expands the positive conflict. This is crucial for effective organizational learning. Often, a gap exists in conflict management in school when a head teacher does not know how to handle the conflict according to situations. Rahim (2001) found that managers did not know how to use effective strategies for managing conflicts. A study conducted by Abdul Gafar, Mohamed Najib, Abdul Rahim Hamdan, Azizi Yahya and Siok Beng Tay (2009) also found that head teachers need to identify and stop the conflict that hinders the achievement.

Hellriegel, Slocum, and Woodman (2001) affirm that there are four types of conflicts that may happen in schools. These include goal conflict which causes by the mismatch of needs, a cognitive conflict which refers to mismatch of thinking, effective conflict is

a mismatch of feelings and finally is the procedure conflict that refers to the mismatch of opinions towards a particular process. However, goal conflict is a common conflict that happens in schools. Mohammed Sani et al (2007) found that conflict factors consist of surroundings, information and unclear tasks, differences in opinions and responsibilities and communication. In general, head teachers spent more time to solve the conflict in schools. The amount of time taken to resolve conflicts distract the school operations and focus of the head teacher in matters related to teaching and learning. According to Abdul Latif (2003), in Malaysia, one and a half hours from the management time is spent to resolve conflicts. Further, Saiti (2014) affirms that school is a social institution that caters the needs of societies. Indirectly, conflicts are unavoidable and head teachers spend more time to resolve the issues or disputes among school members.

## Research Objectives

This study intends to:

- i. identify the levels of conflict management styles of the head teachers in five primary schools in the district of Tampin, Malaysia
- ii. determine the levels of teachers job satisfaction in five primary schools in the district of Tampin, Malaysia
- iii. identify the differences of head teachers conflict management styles in terms of their demographic characteristics
- iv. identify the differences in teachers job satisfaction in terms of their demographic characteristics
- v. Identify the relationships between the conflict management styles of head teachers and teachers job satisfaction

## METHODS

### *Instrument*

A set of the instrument adapted from Rahim Conflict Management Style Model (2002) and “*Job Satisfaction Question Air*” (Balzer et al. 2000) was used. The questionnaire was designed in three sections. Section A solicits information on respondent background. Section B measures five styles of headteacher resolving conflicts and finally, Section C measures the teachers' job satisfaction. Individuals responded to each statement in Section B and C on a five-point Likert scale ( 1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree ). Pilot testing on 30 independent teachers revealed that there were no difficulties in understanding the questionnaires. All the items in the questionnaires were assessed with Cronbach Alpha.

### *Population and Research Samplings*

120 teachers from five primary schools in the district of Tampin were involved in this study. The sample size was determined as suggested by Krejcie dan Morgan (1970).

Table 1 shows the population and research samplings. Random samplings were used to investigate the conflict management styles of head teachers and teachers job satisfaction. According to Noraini (2013), random sampling is the best technique for obtaining samples from huge population size.

Table 1 Teacher Respondents

Name of Schools	No of teachers (Population)	Total
1. Tampin Primary School	46	33
2. Tunku Syed Syaaban Primary School	15	11
3. Keru Primary School	22	16
4. Dr. Sulaiman Primary School	37	26
5. Tunku Besar Tampin Primary School	48	34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>120</b> <b>(78.4%)</b>

The respondents represented head teachers (n=5). Their ages ranged between 46-60 years old (n=5) with work experience between 1-4 years (n=2) and 5-10 years (n=3), and academic qualifications, such as Bachelor Degree in Education (3), Diploma in Education (n=1) and 1 bachelor's degree (n=3).

The respondents represented teachers (n=168). Their ages ranged between 23-35 years old (n=32), 36-45 years old (n=42), and 46-60 years old (n=43). Their work experiences ranged between 1-4 years 9 (n=25), 5-10 years (n=36) and 11 years onwards (n=59). The respondents' academic qualifications, such as Diploma of Malaysian Education (n=34),

Diploma of Graduate Education (n=24), bachelor's degree (n=24) and Bachelor Degree in Education (n=38).

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data were analyzed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Science* (SPSS). Descriptive and inferential analysis were used to determine the frequency and percentage of respondents on their demographic characteristics. For inferential analysis, multivariate (manova) and correlational Pearson were used to test the hypothesis. Demographic characteristics such as age, years of service and academic qualifications were tested to determine the differences in conflict management styles used by the head teachers.

## Levels of Conflict Management Styles of Head Teachers and Teachers Job Satisfaction

Descriptive analysis was used to determine the levels of conflict management styles used by the head teachers. The most preferred style was cooperating style (mean=4.33) followed by adapting style (mean=4.01), compromising style (mean=3.98) bargaining style (mean=3.65) and problem solving style (mean=3.57). Meanwhile, the highest level of teachers job satisfaction was satisfaction towards tasks (mean=4.45), followed by satisfaction towards colleagues (mean=4.39) and satisfaction towards supervisor (mean=3.35).

### **Conflict Management Style of Head Teachers based on Demographic Characteristics**

iAge

Ho1<sup>1</sup>: There is no significant difference between conflict management styles and age

**Table 2:** Wilks' Lambda difference of conflict management styles of head teachers in term of age

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Wilks' Lambda</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>DK Between Group</b>	<b>DK Group</b>	<b>In Sig.</b>
Conflict Management Style	0.879	1.500	2	118	0.140

Table 2 shows that there were no significant differences between conflict management styles of head teachers and age with the value of Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.879$ ,  $F(2, 118) = 0.140$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). Null hypothesis (Ho1<sup>1</sup>) is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference of conflict management styles of headteacher based on age.

ii Work experience

Ho1<sup>2</sup>: There is no significant difference between conflict management styles and work experience.

**Table 3:** Wilks' Lambda differences in conflict management styles of head teachers based on work experience

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Wilks' Lambda</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>DK between Group</b>	<b>DK Group</b>	<b>In Sig.</b>
Conflict Management Styles	0.942	0.691	2	118	0.732

Table 3 shows that there was no significant difference of conflict management styles of head teachers based on years of service with value Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.942$ ,  $F(2, 118) = 0.691$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). Null hypothesis (Ho1<sup>2</sup>) is accepted. However, the difference is not significant. This means that there is no significant difference between conflict management styles of head teachers and work experience.

iii Academic Qualifications

H01<sup>3</sup>: There is no significant difference between conflict management styles and academic qualifications

**Table 4** Wilks' Lambda difference of conflict management style of head teachers based on academic qualifications

Effect		Wilks' Lambda	F	DK Between Group	DK Group	In Sig.
Conflict Management Style		0.853	1.222	2	118	0.253

Table 4 shows that there were no significant differences in conflict management styles of head teachers based on the academic qualifications in which value Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.853$ ,  $F(2, 118) = 0.253$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). Null hypothesis (H01<sup>3</sup>) is accepted.

### Comparison between teachers job satisfaction based on teachers demographic characteristics

iAge

H02<sup>1</sup>: There is no significant difference between job satisfaction and age

**Table 5** Wilks' Lambda difference of job satisfaction based on age

Effect		Wilks' Lambda	F	DK Between Group	DK Group	In Sig.
Job satisfaction		0.911	1.819	2	118	0.096

Table 5 shows that there were no significant differences between job satisfaction and age with value Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.911$ ,  $F(2, 118) = 0.096$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). Null hypothesis (H02<sup>1</sup>) is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference between job satisfaction and age.

ii Work experience

H02<sup>2</sup>: There is no significant difference between job satisfaction and work experience

**Table 6** Wilks' Lambda difference of job satisfaction based on work experience

Effect		Wilks' Lambda	F	DK Between Group	DK Group	In Sig.
Job satisfaction		0.849	3.275	2	118	0.004

Table 6 shows that there were no significant differences between job satisfaction and work experience with value Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.849$ ,  $F(2, 118) = 0.004$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). Null hypothesis (H02<sup>2</sup>) is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between job satisfaction and work experience.

A post Hoc Scheffe analysis was conducted to identify the difference of job satisfaction towards tasks based on work experience as in Table 4.30.

**Table 7** Pos Hoc Scheffe difference of job satisfaction based on work experience

(I) Years of Service	(J) Years of Service	Difference mean (I-J)	Standard Deviation	Sig.
1-4 years	5-10 years	0.623	0.574	0.556
	11 years above	-0.757	0.526	0.359
5-10 years	1-4 years	-0.623	0.574	0.556
	11 years above	-1.380*	0.467	0.015
11 years above	1-4 years	0.757	0.526	0.359
	5-10 years	1.380*	0.467	0.015

Table 7 shows that there is a significant difference on job satisfaction tasks based on work experience between 5-10 years and 11 years onwards with mean difference = -1.380 and sig = 0.015 ( $p < 0.05$ ). The mean value shows that teachers with service of 11 years onwards have a higher degree of job satisfaction as compared to teachers with 5-10 years of service. The results also show that there is no significant difference between job satisfaction tasks and other years of service ( $p > 0.05$ ).

### iii Academic qualifications

Ho<sup>23</sup>: There is no significant difference between job satisfaction and academic qualifications

**Table 8** Wilks' Lambda difference job satisfaction based on academic qualifications

Effect	Value Wilks' Lambda	Value F	DK Between Group	DK Group	In Sig.
Academic Qualifications	0.912	1.189	2	118	0.302

Table 8 shows that there is no significant difference between job satisfaction and academic qualifications with value of Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.912$ ,  $F(2, 118) = 0.302$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). Null hypothesis (Ho<sup>23</sup>) is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference between job satisfaction and academic qualifications.

## Correlations between conflict management styles of headteacher and teachers job satisfaction

**Table 9** Pearson Correlations of conflict management styles of head teachers and teachers satisfaction

Conflict Management Style	Job Satisfaction								
	Task			Colleagues			Supervisor (Headteacher)		
	R	Sig.	Interp	R	Sig.	Interp	R	Sig.	Interp
Cooperation	0.475	0.000	Weak	0.591	0.000	Moderate	0.4820	0.000	Weak
Adaptation	0.319	0.000	Weak	0.397	0.000	Weak	0.459	0.000	Weak
Compromising	0.272	0.003	Very Weak	0.407	0.000	Weak	0.304	0.001	Weak
Bargain	0.146	0.112	-	0.326	0.000	Weak	0.145	0.114	-
Problem Solving	0.202	0.027	Very Weak	0.232	0.011	Very Weak	0.155	0.091	-

Table 9 shows the overall analysis of research findings to test the Null Hypothesis. The findings showed that there is no significant difference between conflict management styles of head teachers and their demographic characteristics. However, there is a significant difference between job satisfaction and years of service. There is a significant relationship between conflict management styles of head teachers and teachers job satisfaction.

In conclusion, there is a weak positive correlation between conflict management styles of head teachers and teachers job satisfaction. However, there are no relationships between bargain style and satisfaction towards colleagues and satisfaction towards the headteacher. There is also no relationship between solving problem style and satisfaction towards headteacher. Null hypothesis (Ho3) is rejected.

**Table 9** Hypothesis Conclusions

No.	Hypothesis	Results
1	Ho1- There is no significant difference between conflict management styles of head teachers and demographic characteristics	Hypothesis accepted
	Ho1 <sup>1</sup> : There is no significant difference between conflict management styles and age	Hypothesis accepted
	Ho1 <sup>2</sup> : There is no significant difference between choice of conflict management styles and work experience	Hypothesis accepted
	Ho1 <sup>3</sup> : There is no significant difference between conflict management styles and academic qualifications	Hypothesis accepted
2	Ho2 There is no significant difference between job satisfaction and teachers demographic characteristics	Hypothesis accepted
	Ho2 <sup>1</sup> : There is no significant difference between job satisfaction and age	Hypothesis accepted
	Ho2 <sup>2</sup> : There is no significant difference between job satisfaction and years of service	Hypothesis rejected
	Ho2 <sup>3</sup> : There is no significant difference between teachers job satisfaction and academic qualifications	Hypothesis accepted



- 3 Ho3- There is no significant relationship between conflict management styles of head teachers and teachers job satisfaction Hypothesis rejected
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## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The conflict management styles of head teachers in primary schools in Tampin district was evaluated by the teachers in their schools. The results revealed that all five conflict management styles; cooperating style, adapting style, compromising style, bargain style and problem-solving style were highly used. However, the cooperating style was the highest among all styles. Nevertheless, the other four conflict management styles; adapting style, compromising style, bargain style and problem-solving style were used in balance to resolve conflicts. This suggests that leaders in schools used different styles of conflict management according to conflict situations.

The results of this study are consistent with Broucher (2013) who found that principals in South Carolina Secondary Schools used cooperating style to manage conflicts related to classroom issues. Meanwhile, Saiti (2014) found that head teachers in Greek Primary Schools used cooperating style to strategize in resolving conflicts and improve the school performance. Headteachers were found to favor the cooperating style in managing conflicts because this style put importance on both parties and this encourages ideas in solving problems. A cooperating style is suitable to create a harmonious working environment in schools (Mohd Foad, 2005).

The level of job satisfaction among primary school teachers in Tampin was high. The results further showed that the teachers were highly satisfied with all the three aspects; satisfaction towards tasks, satisfaction towards colleagues and satisfaction towards supervisor (head teacher). The teachers were found mostly satisfied towards their tasks. This suggests that teachers were passionate about their jobs and they were happy with challenging tasks and their capabilities.

The results demonstrated that the head teachers used five styles of conflict management; cooperating style, adapting style, compromising style, bargaining style, and problem-solving style without being influenced by their age. In addition, the head teachers did not find the years of service as factors to influence their decisions in choosing the conflict management styles in schools. It was also found that there was no significant difference between conflict management style and head teachers academic qualifications. The head teachers were able to choose the best style to manage the existing conflicts.

On the other hand, teachers from all ages were satisfied with their jobs from all three aspects; tasks, colleagues and head teachers. However, it was found that teachers with 11 and onwards years of service were highly satisfied with their jobs as compared to teachers with 5 to 10 years of service. The results also demonstrated that teachers were not influenced by academic qualification to feel satisfied with their jobs in schools. In overall, teachers were satisfied with their tasks, colleagues and head teachers.

Correlation analyses demonstrated that there was a relationship between conflict management styles and teachers job satisfaction. The choice to use effective conflict management style contributes to job satisfaction and performance. There was a weak positive correlation between conflict management styles and job satisfaction. This may be caused by other factors such as salary, interest, security and work environment. According to Junaidah et al. (2013), there are other factors that influence job satisfaction such as colleagues, supervision, salary, responsibilities, job promotion, security, and recognition.

Most head teachers highly used the cooperating style, adapting style and compromising style which correlate with job satisfaction. The cooperating style allows win-win situation for both parties. This gives opportunities for teachers to express their point of views and makes them feel appreciated when their voices are heard. Meanwhile, adapting style gives priorities to others. This kind of style requires a person to be kind-hearted, oblige to instructions from the upper level and generous. Compromising style enables a person to sustain healthy work environment and organizational stability. In addition, the compromising style has positive correlations with teachers job satisfaction. The results are inconsistent with Boucher (2013) who found the correlations between cooperating style and encouraging work environment in Secondary School in South Carolina. However, Foo et al. (2005) found that there was a negative correlation between cooperating style and job satisfaction. Headteachers were able to choose suitable conflict management style to suit the context.

This study is relevant in identifying gaps to mold effective leaders with high competencies in every school as envisioned in Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2025. The research findings show that more interventions are needed to increase the head teachers competencies in managing conflict effectively. Past findings demonstrated that most head teachers in schools needed more continuing professional development and training to handle conflict in schools. Policymakers should consider leadership training and new policies designed to cater the needs of head teachers in an effort to increase the teachers' job satisfaction.

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